

“Love, The Most Excellent Way,” Part 1 - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 – January 3rd, 2016

- Today's teaching is part one of a new series I've titled, "Love, The Most Excellent Way."
- We have before us what would arguably be one of the most, if not the most popular passages in all of the pages of scripture.
- For both Christians, as well as those who are not Christians, 1 Corinthians thirteen has come to be known as the love chapter.

Alan Redpath of 1 Corinthians 13 said one could get a spiritual suntan from the warmth of this chapter.

Of this chapter, G. Campbell Morgan wrote that examining it is like dissecting a flower to understand it. If you tear it apart too much, you lose the beauty.

- While there is certainly no lack of comments and quotes concerning this love chapter, there is a lack of understanding about it.
- Some see it as largely poetic as a literary work, however, to do so is to reduce it and secularize it, which is to in fact profane it.
- By profane, I mean to make it common in the sense that you strip it spiritually, and in so doing, you diminish the power therein.

- There's also a danger conversely, to elevate the passage to a level in which a Christian must, in one's own strength, strive for.
- To do this is to miss entirely the point of the passage, this by virtue of the fact that Paul is writing in the context of spiritual gifts.
- In order to understand this chapter, one must understand the context in which Paul addresses this from the previous chapter.

Adam Clarke - "At the conclusion of the preceding chapter the apostle promised to show the Corinthians a more excellent way than that in which they were now proceeding. They were so distracted with contentions, divided by parties, and envious of each other's gifts, that unity was nearly destroyed. This was a full proof that love to God and man was wanting; and that without this, their numerous gifts and other graces were nothing in the eyes of God; for it was evident that they did not love one another, which is a proof that they did not love God; and consequently, that they had not true religion. Having, by his advices and directions, corrected many abuses, and having shown them how in outward things they should walk so as to please God, he now shows them the spirit, temper, and disposition in which this should be done, and without which all the rest must be ineffectual.

- I suppose you could say the more excellent way can be explained as love being the only way spiritual gifts should be exercised.
- In other words, the way we are to eagerly desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit is vis-à-vis "love," which is the most excellent way.
- Enter our text today, where we see that absent this most excellent way of love, I am nothing, I have nothing, and I gain nothing.

1. I am nothing have nothing and gain nothing without love (Verses 1-3)

- v1 Paul says if one speaks in the tongues of men or angels but has not love they're only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal.
- v2 He says if one has the gift of prophecy and fathom's all mysteries and has mountain moving faith but has not love is nothing.
- v3 He says if one gives all they possess to the poor and gives their body to hardship to boast but has not love will gain nothing.

- From just these first three verses, one can surmise that the Corinthian Christians were given over to their own best interests.
- I would suggest that the only thing that mattered to them was their own prestige, power and position within the body of Christ.
- Sadly, it came at the expense of the other members of the body of Christ, especially as it related to their love for one another.

- To their credit, at least they were using the gifts, however, while they may have done the right thing they did it in the wrong way.
- More specifically, they were exercising the gifts, which were right, but they did it with the wrong motivation and the wrong heart.
- The use of the gifts became an abuse of the gifts, such that, they did things that would get them noticed and as such, exalted.

- I see the Corinthian church as being filled with people who were unloving and selfishly put themselves first and put others last.
- I also see the Corinthian church as a place that was filled with those who thought more highly of themselves than they ought to.
- This was especially true when it came to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which were to benefit others instead of only benefiting self.

- It's for this reason the Apostle Paul is teaching them this more excellent way, which was to use the gifts to bless others in love.
- I can't quite get over the strength of Paul's words in these first three verses, in that he's hitting the proverbial nail on the head.
- If you really think about it, he's basically telling them without love, everything and anything they do or say becomes worthless.

- First, Paul packs a powerful punch in writing this because the great orators back in that day were seen as superstars are today.
- This because, in the first century eloquence of speech was esteemed and admired in that Grecian culture especially in Corinth.
- What Paul is saying is these eloquent speakers are only making loud and obnoxious noise and sounds if they don't have love.

- He gets even more blunt when he goes on to say that those with prophetic knowledge and mountain moving faith are nothing.
- Absent love, one who possesses the gift of fathoming the deepest of mysteries and moving the tallest of mountains is nothing.
- Actually it's the third one in verse three that really hits hard because Paul addresses the one who gives all they own to the poor.

- It's important to note what the motivation is for the one whom Paul is describing in verse three namely, it's so that he can boast.
- If that's the motivation behind all that we do then we ultimately have nothing as a reward, and it will come to nothing as a result.
- There is coming a day when all we've done will be shown for what it is, whether it was motivated by self, or motivated by love.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (NIV) — 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.